

Bilingual Special Education Teacher Preparation: A Conceptual Framework

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The purpose of this article is to discuss a conceptual framework for bilingual education teacher preparation. The framework described is based on information provided by experienced bilingual special education field specialists (teachers, administrators, clinicians, and professors) about the competencies bilingual special education teachers need to demonstrate in order to meet the unique needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities. The article describes five areas relevant to the preparation of bilingual special education teachers: language proficiency, assessment, planning and delivery of instruction, culture and advancement in the profession.

Research on effective teaching has provided information about the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed by United States' educators to teach English proficient students successfully, especially those who come from mainstream culture (Brophy, 1979; Carrasquillo, 1990; Wittrock, 1987). The research literature on effective instruction of special education students (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Ortiz & Garcia, 1990) and limited English proficient students in bilingual or English as a second language settings (Cummins, 1984; Ramirez, Yuen & Ramey, 1991; Tikunoff, 1985) is also abundant. However, research and literature on effective teaching of linguistically and culturally diverse students with disabilities is scarce and in the process of development. This article addresses this important field of bilingual special education. It is based on a study completed by Rodriguez (1997), which addressed the necessary professional and teaching competencies of bilingual special education teachers. This paper outlines a conceptual framework for bilingual special education

teacher preparation programs using the 1997 Rodriguez data on the identification of the necessary professional and teaching competencies of bilingual special education teachers by field specialists. Academic standards published by the National Association for Bilingual Education (1992) and the Council for Exceptional Children (1993) provided the theoretical foundation about the competencies of bilingual special education teachers. This conceptual framework establishes five areas of professional and teaching competencies: language proficiency, assessment, culture, planning and delivery of instruction, and professionalism.

Bilingual Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs: A Framework

The term "bilingual special education" continues to evolve. The literature defines it as the use of students' home language and culture, along with English, in an individually designed program of instruction for students who have been recommended for special education classrooms (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Carrasquillo, 1990). To provide an appropriate educational context for culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities, teachers need a theoretical and methodological foundation in bilingual education as well as special education. Bilingual special education teacher preparation programs need to:

1. Provide theoretical/practical knowledge of bilingual education and bilingualism as instrumental functions;
2. Utilize a variety of assessment procedures;
3. Include the concept of culture as a core value for the development of students' cultural identity and self concept;
4. Provide extensive training in the planning and delivery of instruction to promote academic achievement;
5. Familiarize prospective teachers with the concept of professionalism to maintain a high level of competence and integrity in the profession; and

6. Provide a field experience component in which theory is applied in the bilingual special education classrooms.

The Bilingual Special Education Teacher Preparation Program must prepare bilingual special education teachers who: are fluent in both English and the native language of the students, value commitment to teaching bilingual special education learners, show high academic expectations for culturally and linguistically diverse learners with special needs, demonstrate sensitivity to the cultural and linguistic diversity of the students, advocate for bilingual education, are familiar with appropriate assessment tools and techniques, and provide challenging and innovative instruction.

The Curriculum of Bilingual Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs

The preparation of qualified teachers is the most important component described in the education reform of the National Commission of Teaching and America's Future (1996). The content of the curriculum of the teacher preparation program must provide the knowledge skills and attitudes required to prepare qualified teachers. This paper proposes that, in bilingual special education teacher preparation programs, the curriculum content must be divided into five areas. These areas are: (a) knowledge of language proficiency, (b) identification of appropriate assessment tools and techniques, (c) awareness of students' cultural and linguistic diversity, (d) opportunities for theoretical and practical experiences in the planning and delivery of instruction, and (e) opportunities for advancement in the field/profession of bilingual special education. The following sections define these areas and provide the specific content to be included in each one.

Language Proficiency

Bilingual proficiency is an important component in the field of bilingual special education. Bilingual proficiency is defined as an

individual's ability to perform and communicate in two languages in an informal social setting as well as being able to function in a more formal, cognitively demanding academic setting (Abbott, 1985; Cummins, 1986; Hamayan, Kwait, & Pearlman, 1985). Bilingual special education teachers must be aware of the role of language in developing academic context and skills in culturally and linguistically diverse students. They must demonstrate the ability to teach in two languages (Baca & Cervantes, 1989; Harley, Allen, Cummins & Swain, 1990; Ovando & Collier, 1985; Trueba, 1987). This competency needs to be presented in required courses in teacher education programs. At the completion of the program, teaching candidates should demonstrate the following competencies:

1. Proficiency in two languages;
2. Knowledge of second language acquisition theory and pedagogy that focuses on the integration of language and content;
3. An understanding of the nature of bilingualism and the process of becoming bilingual;
4. An understanding of structural differences between the child's first and second language;
5. Classroom experience in teaching English as a second language;
6. Ability to assess student language proficiency in both native and second language, including oral and written language, as well as various language domains and dialects;
7. An understanding of the basic concepts such as contacts between languages and its implication for the instructional program; and
8. Ability to develop a curriculum that integrates language and content.

Assessment Tools and Techniques

Assessment is defined as the process of gathering data about an individual or group of students for the purpose of making instructional decisions to improve the educational program for the students (Salvia & Ysseldyke, 1988; Several, 1990). Assessment has a prominent place

in the diagnosis and evaluation of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities. IDEA mandates assessment and evaluation of students based not only on test results, but on a comprehensive multidisciplinary evaluation and team decision. It is proposed that at the completion of the teacher education program trainees must demonstrate the following competencies.

1. Knowledge of methods for monitoring students' progress;
2. Knowledge of the basic terminology, legal regulations, and guidelines regarding students' assessment;
3. Ability to use various types of assessment procedures (standardized tests, norm-referenced tests, portfolio authentic assessment, curriculum based, work samples, observations, task analysis);
4. Familiarity with the appropriate application and interpretation of scores: grade scores vs. standard scores, percentile rank, age/grade and equivalents;
5. Familiarity with the typical procedures used for the screening, pre-referral, referral, and classification of special education students;
6. An understanding of the issues involved in the assessment, eligibility, programming, and placement of culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional learners;
7. Knowledge of the due process rights related to assessment, eligibility and placement for students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse;
8. Knowledge of assessment information to make instructional decisions, plan individual student programs, and suggest appropriate learning environments;
9. Ability to report assessment results to students, parents, administrators, and other professionals; and
10. Capacity to encourage student self assessment of his/her skills and abilities.

Students' Culture and Linguistic Diversity

Culture is defined as a shared group of strategies agreed by a group through a process of interaction of ideas, attitudes, meanings,

and hierarchy of values belonging to that group (Cushner, McClelland & Safford, 1992). Individuals bring their own culturally and socially driven way of knowing to the learning process (Gardner, 1991; Parla, Karnes & Ludlam, 1996). Students from diverse backgrounds come to school with a wide assortment of experiences and understanding. Authorities explain that individual learners have different pictures, each one different from each other, and classroom teachers must connect instruction to those pictures. Bilingual special education teachers need to be aware that when language is a core value for a cultural group, it will also play a crucial role in the development of students' cultural identity and self-concept. At the completion of the teacher education program, trainees must demonstrate the following competencies.

1. Incorporate activities, materials, and techniques related to language minority students' history, contributions, and life styles;
2. Identify approaches in assisting families to become active participants in the educational team;
3. Recognize and accept different patterns of child development within and between cultures in order to formulate realistic objectives;
4. Plan strategies to respond positively to the diversity of behaviors involved in cross cultural environments and classrooms;
5. Provide field experiences in order to assist children to interact successfully in cross cultural settings;
6. Demonstrate awareness of the way in which a learner's culture can permeate all areas of the curriculum;
7. Describe approaches to develop awareness of the learner's cultural diversity value;
8. Know the effects of cultural and socioeconomic variables on the student's learning styles (cognitive and affective) and general level of development and socialization; and
9. Recognize cultural similarities and differences between individuals of the United States and those of other countries to identify potential conflicts and opportunities these may create.

Delivery of Instruction

One of the most contested issues in teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs is related to the effective methods of instruction. This area is extremely important as teachers must promote the development of effective academic, social, and cognitive skills; and provide opportunities and experiences to enable students to succeed in school. (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 1996). Successful teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students must promote academic achievement. Classroom teachers striving to strengthen culturally and linguistically diverse students' academic competence must develop and implement lessons that are sensitive to the cultural and educational background of the students, and promote students' multicultural understanding in the class. At the completion of the program, candidates must demonstrate the following competencies.

1. Knowledge of the basic classroom management theories, methods, and techniques to use with students with culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional learning needs;
2. Ability to teach students to use thinking, problem solving, and other cognitive strategies to meet their individual needs;
3. Capacity to develop comprehensive individualized student programs.
4. Knowledge of effective innovative teaching techniques for use in various content areas and through two languages;
5. Ability to select instructional programs and practices which respond to cultural, linguistic, and gender differences;
6. Capacity to design a learning environment that encourages active participation by learners in a variety of individual and group learning activities;
7. Ability to develop, acquire, and evaluate materials appropriate to the bilingual/multicultural classroom; and
8. Ability to interpret and use assessment data for instructional planning;

9. Understanding of strategies for crisis prevention and intervention;

10. Ability to collaborate with general education classroom teachers and other school personnel in integrating students into various learning environments;

11. Knowledge of curriculum development strategies to organize the curriculum into meaningful and relevant units;

12. Knowledge of procedures for identifying biases and deficiencies in existing curricula, and of strategies to modify the curriculum to better address student linguistic, cultural, and developmental needs;

13. Capacity to select, adapt, and use instructional strategies and materials according to the characteristics of the culturally and linguistically diverse learner, i.e. different styles, diverse cultures and languages, and development levels;

14. Capacity to incorporate evaluation, planning, and management procedures which match learners' needs with the instructional environment;

15. Ability to use collaborative strategies with students, parents, teachers, and other school and community personnel to plan individualized student programs;

16. Knowledge of applicable laws, rules and regulations, as well as procedural safeguards regarding the planning and implementation of management of student behavior;

17. Ability to plan and develop an in-class management system to assess student achievement in relation to objectives of instruction;

18. Familiarity with available community resources;

19. Ability to conduct self evaluation of instruction;

20. Capacity to integrate affective, social, and career/vocational skills with academic curricula; and

21. Ability to apply effective teaching management practices and research recommendations.

Professional Advancement

The term “professionalism” is defined as teachers’ characteristics that reflect their expertise, knowledge base, values, and attitudes; and call for self-regulation, professional autonomy, expert knowledge, and guidance for professional practice. Bilingual special education teachers must develop the ability to reflect on their own actions, observations, and responses to experience, and apply these reflections and their academic knowledge to the design and implementation of new approaches to teaching (Dilworth, 1992). At the completion of the program candidates must:

1. Promote and maintain a high level of competence and integrity in the practice of the profession;
2. Comply with local, state, and federal professional regulations for self monitoring and evaluation requirements;
3. Become involved in on-going research in the areas of bilingual special education;
4. Engage in professional activities which benefit exceptional individuals, their families and/or colleagues;
5. Participate in professional conferences and organizations; and
6. Demonstrate the importance of serving as models for bilingual special education students.

Field Experiences

The Bilingual Special Education Teacher Program must incorporate experiences essential for educating culturally and linguistically diverse students with special needs. Prospective bilingual special education teachers must be involved in field experiences on an on-going basis. Field experience involves teacher candidates’ observations of teaching, student teaching, and other practical activities in schools. Teachers should be placed in schools, especially in bilingual special education classrooms, from the beginning of the college program to receive a developmentally sound teacher training experience. A culminating field experience must include a student teaching or practicum with the purpose of practicing

all components of the teaching profession, especially the area of planning and delivery of instruction with linguistically and culturally diverse students with disabilities. Teachers must be supervised by bilingual college supervisors with professional backgrounds and experience in bilingual special education.

Conclusion

The authors recommend that the above conceptual framework be piloted in teacher education programs across the United States. In piloting the above theoretical assumptions, three main questions/issues need to be addressed. First, does the curriculum of the teacher training program include the above areas? Second, does the program have a plan to fulfill the goals of the components of each area? Third, do participants in the program feel that they have been properly prepared to teach linguistically and culturally diverse students with disabilities?

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